

# BBC, Al Jazeera and globalisation of news (guest blog)

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/07/21/bbc-al-jazeera-and-globalisation-of-news-guest-blog/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/07/21/bbc-al-jazeera-and-globalisation-of-news-guest-blog/)

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Essays

This is an edited version of an essay by Polis Summer School student Victoria Yates.

The idea of globalization is not new, despite many of the modern connotations attached to the term. The creation of the printing press created much the same revolution in communication, connecting people for the first time in a wide manner beyond traditional dialogical contact.

Benedict Anderson described this “commoditization of the printed word” [4] as “[making] it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to recognize that there were people much like themselves beyond the face-to-face community. That is, the leap out of the local was made by way of one media technology; or at least that technology in combination with the market” [5].

Since then media technologies have only gone further to connect people at even greater distances and in ever more ‘personal’ ways (first introducing voice, and then visual imagery). What this has done is altered the nature of media to consumer communication. In its foundations it was a dialogical but essentially one-way process.

As technology has evolved the consumer is constantly drawn further into the process of discussion. A major impact therefore of the globalization of news stems from this, in that diversity of news sources now available to the consumer is greater than ever before, affording a wide variety of voices.

A key example of this would be the growth of al-Jazeera. Initially serving as a platform for an Arab perspective on regional news, an attempt to counter-act the “Anglo-American domination of news and current affairs in one of the world’s most geopolitically sensitive areas” [6], al-Jazeera has since expanded to other areas of the world, taking its unique ‘specialist, local’ approach along with it. Hugh Miles predicted that, “in the decades ahead we can expect only more al-Jazeeras, adding to an ever greater torrent of information, as regional ideas spread around the world and become global” [7].

With growth of both alternative and ‘mainstream’ media onto a global stage the consumer has the potential to engage with, and form opinions on, the media’s content in a way never before experienced. It is this empowered populace that is reveling in the growing diversity of media that is placing not only content, but journalistic norms in competition.

Some critics argue that what we are experiencing is the plurality of news sources but not the diversity, the key distinction being that for some the voices and perspectives are the same but available from a wider number of outlets.

For some what we are experiencing is a new form of Western Imperialism on a different stage “given the concentration of international communication hardware and software power among a few dominant actors in the global arena who want an ‘open’ international order created by their own national power and by the power of transnational media and communication corporations” [8].

From this perspective the consumers, far from finding a greater voice, find themselves at the mercy of a new colonial power seeking to control and manipulate the media environment.

In both instances the existence of groups such as al-Jazeera seem to form a counterfoil to the negative

interpretations of media as ethnocentrically driven by a 'Western' agenda. Even the British group BBC have, arguably, proven both adaptable and impartial in their work, expanding their operations to other countries and proving both popular and well received in varying localities.

Another impact on the citizen that is attached to ideas of globalization in the media is that of value clashes. Each state has their own set of values and ideals that are intensely variable at times. Even amongst countries often grouped together by other social factors, such as "the West", show a great deal of diversity.

As with any widespread change globalization of news media impacts in differing ways on the citizen, and as it is relatively young in its time, the whole moral and ethical landscape has not yet been fully defined, nor has its impact been understood in its entirety yet. However, I feel that despite the clashes and the difficulties created by in a sense 'armchair voyeurism' of other cultures the globalization of media is creating a market for more voices, more connectivity, and ultimately, hopefully a better informed populace.

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